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East Carolina U. Uses Simple Technology to Link Its Students With Peers Overseas

By KARIN FISCHER

Just 1 percent of East Carolina University undergraduates study overseas.

But thanks to a pair of enterprising faculty members, a growing number of students are having international experiences without ever leaving the Greenville, N.C., campus. The university's Global Understanding program uses inexpensive and relatively unsophisticated technology — a low-bandwidth video link and e-mail chat — to connect East Carolina students with counterparts at 23 institutions in 17 countries and five continents.

While other colleges have made use of computer hookups to bring a global perspective into the classroom, the East Carolina model is distinctive in that it links each participating class with partners at several foreign universities, exposing students to multiple points of view. Its low-cost, low-tech approach has allowed the university to build relationships with institutions in less-well-off countries like Namibia and Moldova and to sustain such partnerships even as budget constraints have forced many institutions to curtail their travel, both overseas and out of state.

In just five years, the program has gone from a one-time pilot, hatched over a coffee break, to a mainstay of the university's general-education curriculum. Freshman-level Global Understanding course sections consistently fill up during the first hours of registration, says Rosina C. Chia, assistant vice chancellor for global academic efforts, and other faculty members are adapting the model for use in their own teaching.

"It's really powerful," says Marilyn Sheerer, East Carolina's provost. "It's not a stretch to see how students' perspectives have changed."

The program got its start during a casual conversation between Ms. Chia, then a professor of psychology and interim dean of communications and computer science, and Elmer Poe, who was then interim dean of technology. It would be nice, the two agreed, if there was a way to leverage East Carolina's strength in online and distance education to expand international opportunities for its students.

Within months, in July 2003, the first class, which connected students in North Carolina and at Soochow University in China, was under way.

Although the initial course was part of an intensive summer session, it established the basic model for future Global Understanding offerings: Classes of 15 to 20 students are split in half, and each group is given a series of questions meant to guide conversation. One half discusses the queries, which tend to focus on cultural practices like college life and family structure, as a group via videoconferencing, while
the other students engage in one-on-one discussions on the same topics with overseas partners through e-mail. Halfway through the class meeting, the groups switch.

The two approaches give students insights into societal norms and expose them to individual perspectives on topics that are sometimes sensitive, says Mr. Poe, who is now associate vice chancellor for academic outreach. Students are required to write papers with their foreign partners, and the in-class discussions are supplemented by outside readings that provide an academic foundation. For example, students might read anthropological texts and learn about how different societies view the role of the family.

A Complex Model

After the success of the initial class, Mr. Poe and Ms. Chia, with the backing of East Carolina administrators, took time to formally outline the course structure and to enlist instructors and technical-support staff. They also set out to recruit additional foreign universities.

The pilot partner, Soochow University, came about through the connections of Ms. Chia, who is originally from China. But Ms. Chia and Mr. Poe wanted to be more strategic about forming relationships. They reached out to the U.S. Department of State and to foreign governments for guidance and sought to attract institutions from countries and regions that "will be important on the world stage for the next 15, 20, 30 years," Mr. Poe says.

Early on, they decided against organizing the course around a single, bilateral relationship. Instead, each section of it includes East Carolina and three foreign partners. The four institutions are paired for five weeks at a time and then change partners, so that all students get the benefit of learning about three different cultures during the semester.

"We don't want to just go to a country and suck up its culture for the benefit of our students only," Ms. Chia says.

There has been consensus to hold the courses in English, which tends to be the common language among all the partners, Ms. Chia says. But scheduling class times hasn't always come as easily.

To accommodate partners in parts of the world as disparate as Gambia, Malaysia, and Russia, classes sometimes have to be held early in the morning or well into the evening for some institutions. One group of Chinese students, Ms. Chia recalls, came to class in winter coats because the heat in their building had been turned off after dark.

The complex, multipartner model has meant that the Global Understanding program has expanded slowly, Mr. Poe and Ms. Chia acknowledge. The university had a sufficient number of partners to offer seven sections of the course this semester, which means just a fraction of East Carolina's 4,000 freshmen could enroll. They hope to add an additional section this fall.

But Mr. Poe and Ms. Chia say they want to be choosy. Only about one of three possible partners is a good fit; some don't want to make the time commitment, while others are not comfortable with the student-driven style of the course.

Although the course is taught remotely, teams of East Carolina faculty members and technological experts visit each foreign campus to train instructors and to gauge the enthusiasm of university leaders. East Carolina typically signs two-year agreements with the partner institutions and won't go forward unless the project has backing from top administrators, Ms. Chia says.

Some relationships, nevertheless, stumble. After political unrest broke out in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the government stopped paying faculty members at Osh State University, East Carolina's partner there. Two students took over and led the class until the end of the semester, but the partnership was not continued.
Another reason for the site visit is to assess the level of technological infrastructure and support. Often, it is minimal, and so, while East Carolina holds its classes in an up-to-date "global classroom," Mr. Poe says he and Ms. Chia deliberately use the most basic equipment. The camera and software for videoconferencing cost about $350. Video is transmitted over a simple Internet connection, and East Carolina handles additional technical support. (The university often helps the partner look for outside sources of funds to cover the costs.) Beyond that, each partner needs eight computers so students can chat by e-mail, Mr. Poe says, "but they can be old and decrepit as long as they can get on the Internet."

Still, sufficient bandwidth remains one of the program's biggest challenges, he says.

**Internationalizing the Classroom**

Back in Greenville, East Carolina officials are seeking to expand the number of introductory Global Understanding courses. One challenge, Ms. Sheerer, university provost says, is that class size must be small, which means additional instructors are needed.

The university is also encouraging faculty members to use the Global Understanding model to internationalize their own upper-level courses. Ms. Chia and Mr. Poe help lead workshops each semester, and several professors have begun connecting with overseas institutions as part of their course design. For example, students in a computer-science course are working in multinational teams on a software-design project, while a Spanish class holds weekly language practice with an English class in Peru.

In Patricia (Patch) Clark's theater education course, students swapped folklore and indigenous children's tales with their counterparts in Peru and Russia. They then adapted some of the foreign stories into short plays that they performed as part of a children's theater troop that visits schools throughout Eastern North Carolina.

Sloane Burke's health-education majors have held discussions with students in Germany and Moldova on issues such as health disparities, infectious disease, and maternal and child health. Ms. Burke, an assistant professor, said coordinating lectures overseas means more work; still, she will use a grant to travel this summer to China, where she hopes to establish a new partnership.

The global nature of the courses creates "a richer learning environment," she says.

And while the Global Understanding project was established to bring an international experience to the East Carolina campus, it has also spurred students who complete the course to go overseas; now about 10 percent of those students subsequently study abroad.

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Board supports rezoning, grants

By Tom Marine
The Daily Reflector

Monday, May 04, 2009

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a number of motions on Monday directed at rezoning property and securing grant funding for the Pitt County Sheriff's Office and the Pitt Area Transit System.

The funds, from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, could be used to purchase patrol cars with mobile computing terminals and eight new vehicles for the transit system. The sheriff's office grant could total nearly $150,000, and PATS is seeking about $380,000.

Sheriff Mac Manning presented the grant possibility to the county commissioners. It is being applied jointly through the Greenville Police Department.

By switching to the stimulus grant, PATS Director Rebecca Clayton said the county could save more than $17,000. Originally, the system applied through the capital portion of the Community Transportation Program Grant that was sent to the North Carolina Department of Transportation, according to the agenda.

Pitt County Planning Director James Rhodes informed the board of a rezoning request for property along N.C. 11 North between Greenville and Bethel. County commissioners voted in favor of rezoning the land — 2.18 acres — to general commercial from rural agricultural.

"The general commercial district is intended to accommodate a range of retail, service, office, limited wholesale and moderate density multifamily residential uses," the agenda states.

Also at Monday's meeting:

Rick Niswander, dean of the College of Business at East Carolina University, detailed a condensed version of his presentation on the state and regional economies. He said personal consumption is down and savings are up due to the problems on Wall Street and in the credit markets.

Niswander said the economy could turn slightly positive in the fourth quarter of 2009.

"The world is not coming to an end," he said. "I think we have hit the bottom."

Pitt County Health Director John Morrow provided an update on the H1N1 flu outbreak. He said more than 200 cases of the virus have been confirmed in 30 states across the United States, including one case in North Carolina.

"It's been very limited in North Carolina, but I do anticipate it will spread more," Morrow said. "Right now, we're looking at it like an extra flu season. We're learning more and more about this virus every day."

The board unanimously supported the efforts of Farmville in requesting $36,000 to assist with the certification of its new industrial park. The funding would come from the North Carolina Eastern Region, according to the agenda.

Commissioners agreed to send a letter to their congressional delegation, supporting an expansion request from the PCS Phosphate Co. in Beaufort County. Jay McRoy, chairman of the Beaufort County Board of Commissioners, attended and asked for the board's help, so the Aurora company may obtain a mining permit from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Contact Tom Marine at tmarine@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9567.
May 2, 2009, Darts and Laurels

Saturday, May 02, 2009

Laurels — To efforts made by Ayden-Grifton High School to make the school’s prom affordable in a grim economy. The southern Pitt County school reduced ticket prices to $15 and held the event on campus in order to reduce its expense. Proms should be a special time for high school students, but it needn’t be excessively painful to the pocketbook. Well done to school officials for that decision.

Laurels — To the final home series for the East Carolina University softball team, which hosts Campbell and Virginia Tech in Greenville this weekend. Though the team is too often overshadowed by the school’s baseball team, the Pirates stand atop the Conference USA standings and look to finish the season strong as they bid farewell to a talented group of seniors hoping to win a title this year.

Darts — To the state’s first suspected cases of swine flu, reported on Thursday in Onslow and Wake counties. With the influenza virus spreading across the nation, North Carolina had avoided the sickness until late in the week, when the state health director announced the suspicious test results. There’s no need for panic, but please take reasonable precautions to prevent its spread.

Darts — To the stressful exam period under way for East Carolina students, which will help determine the final marks at semester’s end. The university’s last day of classes was Monday, launching a period of intense studying and review before final projects were due and exams were held. It may be challenging, but the summer is close enough to embrace.

Laurels — To the strides toward health made through the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce’s Live Healthy Greenville challenge. Nearly 700 area residents participated in the 100-day challenge, which concluded last week with great results. Participants lost 2,500 pounds and reported physical activity totalling 19,000 hours.

Darts — To the poorly written order issued by Gov. Beverly Perdue this week that imposed a 0.5 percent pay cut on state employees. Her office was forced to rewrite the order to clarify language that confused many of those affected. A greater attention to detail would be welcome, especially considering the importance of the directive being issued.

Laurels — To the Pirate Treasure program, an effort by the university and the city of Greenville that hopes to reduce the amount of furniture and other usable items that students leave on the roadside for trash collection. Students are encouraged to drop off items like kitchen appliances and household goods, and they will be distributed to local residents in need.

Compiled by Brian Colligan, editorial page editor of The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9507 or via e-mail at bcolligan@coxnc.com

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State scales back flu reaction

Stay-home orders relaxed for the ill

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

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Overwhelmed with laboratory samples that have turned up few cases of swine flu, North Carolina health officials said Monday that they are scaling back their testing and will no longer require people with mild flu symptoms to stay home.

The outbreak, on the brink of being declared a pandemic, triggered an aggressive response last week, with state officials ordering home isolation for everyone with flu symptoms who also had recently been traveling until the state laboratory conducted tests to rule out the new virus.

Within days, 433 nasal swabs were sent in.

But only one person in North Carolina has been confirmed to have the new flu. Seven others have probable cases. Five of those seven involve a cluster of co-workers in Craven County. The elementary school attended by a child of one of the co-workers has been temporarily closed.

Meanwhile, all those hundreds of people being tested were ordered to stay home. Most had mild to moderate flu symptoms, including fever, body aches, sore throat and coughing.

"Somebody coming in with flu-like illness and fever, that's a ton of people," said Dr. Jeffrey Engel, state health director.

Now, Engel said, the state will test only people who are severely ill with flu symptoms, or who seek medical care at one of the roughly 80 clinics and doctors' offices statewide that participate in a flu surveillance system. Cases involving school children or long-term care residents also will be tested.

The downshifting from high alert marks a new phase in the state's pandemic response plan.

Engel said the first phase established that the new flu virus is in North Carolina, and now the state is moving to community control in situations where larger groups may be exposed.

"We can take a deep breath and reassess every day and implement up or down, and scale it depending on events," Engel said.

Even if the number of infections peters out in the next few weeks, he said, the virus may roar back in the fall. Public health leaders are taking precautions to maintain antiviral production and develop a vaccine.

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UNC activists file complaint

Tancredo protesters take up case with police committee

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

CHAPEL HILL - Three local activists complained to a police accreditation committee Monday that campus public-safety officers unnecessarily pepper-sprayed them in the eyes during a protest of a speech by former Colorado congressman Tom Tancredo last month.

Members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Protesters Defense Committee also filed a formal complaint against the public safety department, claiming police action during and after the protest was "unnecessary and politically motivated with the intent of spreading a chill across campus."

"I shouldn't be concerned about my safety for going there and chanting," said student Anthony Maggione, who said he sought medical treatment from an EMT on the scene and from a campus health clinic the next day. "I was blinded, and I couldn't see anything."

Campus Police Chief Jeff McCracken said the complaint would initiate a more thorough investigation than had been planned previously.

"I never received a formal complaint until today, which is interesting timing," said McCracken, referring to the accreditation committee's visit this week. "Now that we've received a formal complaint, there'll be a full-blown investigation because of the formal complaint, not because of the circumstances."

Police spokesman Randy Young and Chancellor Holden Thorp have been saying for weeks that the department would investigate officers' handling of the protest. McCracken declined to explain how a full-blown investigation would differ from what was already promised except to say that more people would be interviewed.

"There were no injuries, and there was no complainant," said McCracken, explaining why a more thorough investigation did not begin immediately upon the officers' use of force. "Anonymous complaints that are launched through the media are not considered complaints."

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies will not investigate specific incidents, but will make sure DPS has a process in place to handle citizen complaints, according to a commission spokesman.

The protesters defense committee continues to call for an independent investigation, a permanent civilian review board and the dropping of all criminal charges related to recent political protests.

The formal complaint claims that on the evening of the Tancredo protest, Lt. Lawrence Twiddy threw 22-year-old Haley Koch onto the floor, across the Bingham Hall corridor and into the opposite wall.

"She was bruised for several days as a result of the excessive force," states the complaint. It
also states that an officer arrested Koch the following week outside a class and led her across campus in handcuffs.

"She was visibly and publicly humiliated to set an example that is designed to chill the speech and political activity of other students," the complaint reads.

The complaint also says an officer grabbed one woman by the hair, that eight to 10 protesters were sprayed directly in the face with pepper spray and that a student-activist who was not at the protest was repeatedly "harassed" by investigators.

The protesters also questioned why recent political protests have led to seven arrests while more disruptive, damaging and dangerous events such as the basketball championship celebration on Franklin Street and a 3,000-student "flash rave" in Davis Library were not as harshly punished.

"It is clear that the campus police are selectively targeting student activists," the complaint says.

Shirish and Teema Devastali, whose daughter Rakhee participated in the Tancredo protest, blasted the police response.

"The campus police are here to protect our students," said Teema Devastali. "I feel very scared as a mother. I don't want to lose my child. I certainly don't want my child to be disabled either."

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Universities Cutting Teams as They Trim Their Budgets

By KEN BELSON

After three decades of steady growth in the number of teams and student-athletes, colleges and universities large and small, private and public, east and west, are slashing millions of dollars from their sports budgets.

Colleges have dismissed athletic staff, reduced hours for pools and practice courts, and increased equipment and facility fees. Some have also cut the size of their travel squads, eliminated trips requiring air travel and done away with housing teams in hotels the night before home games.

Institutions facing fat deficits have risked the wrath of students, parents and alumni and cut scholarships and teams. The University of Cincinnati wiped out scholarships for three men's sports: track, cross-country and swimming. Stanford University told its fencing teams to look for other financing.

The University of Massachusetts dropped its ski teams, and Kutztown University in Pennsylvania eliminated its men's soccer and men's swimming teams. On Friday, the University of Washington said it would cut its swimming teams to save as much as $1.2 million, less than half of the spending that the athletic department needs to reduce.

"We just couldn't make cuts across the board anymore," said Blake James, the athletic director at the University of Maine, explaining why his department cut its men's soccer and women's volleyball programs. "We were bleeding our programs to death."

Even the wealthiest universities are pinched. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced it was cutting eight teams — Alpine skiing, competitive pistol, golf, wrestling and men's and women's ice hockey and gymnastics — as a way to trim $1.5 million from its athletic budget.

Taken together, the cuts could deeply alter the college sports landscape. The gap will widen between the haves with television and sponsorship deals, and the have-nots that rely mostly on alumni and their universities for financing.

"One of the things we have to worry about is competitive equity," said Myles Brand, the president of the N.C.A.A. "If some schools have too small a budget, it could affect their play, and that isn't fair."

Programs that disappear are unlikely to return, particularly in Olympic sports like gymnastics and swimming. That could lead to less diversity on campuses and weaken the country's prowess at international events.

"It may take a couple of years to shake out," said Robert Bowlsby, the director of athletics at Stanford, which cut $1.8 million from its athletic budget this year and plans to save $3 million next year and $4.5 million in 2011. "Once programs go away, they seldom come back. And if they do, they take many years to start again because all
the remaining athletes are off campus and the money gets used for something else.”

College sports have grown steadily during the past three decades thanks to Title IX, which provided equal opportunity in men’s and women’s sports. An increase in television and sponsorship dollars and growing pressure from alumni to spend more on athletics have fueled a surge in sports programs, too.

According to N.C.A.A. figures, a record 17,682 college teams competed in the 2007-8 academic year, 60 percent more than in 1981-82. During that time, the number of student-athletes grew 78 percent, to a record 412,768.

The number of women’s teams has increased drastically, particularly in sports like lacrosse and soccer, thanks partly to growth in the number of youth leagues. The number of men’s teams has also risen, though more modestly.

Sports like fencing, gymnastics and wrestling have gradually disappeared on campuses, overshadowed by more prominent baseball, basketball and football teams.

Yet only twice in the past two decades — in 1988-89 and 1997-98 — has there been a net decline in the number of men’s and women’s athletic programs nationally.

The growth in college athletics has made it harder to cut back during lean times because of resistance from students — especially those with athletic scholarships — their parents, alumni, sponsors and civic boosters.

“There’s great pressure on schools to win,” said John Cheslock, who teaches at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. “If I’m an athletic director and I drop a sport, I’m going to have everyone who plays the sport angry at me, as well as parents and former athletes and donors.”

Though official figures are not yet available, Brand said he expected the number of athletic programs to shrink about 1 percent this year, or by about 130 teams.

“We’ve seen some sports close because of financial reasons in the past, but that was spotty,” he said. “This is the worst I’ve seen it.”

He said he did not have a forecast for the 2009-10 academic year.

There are, to be sure, sacred cows. At many universities, football and basketball bring in more money than they spend, because of strong support from alumni, ticket sales and television and sponsorship revenue.

Some programs are so wealthy that they subsidize entire athletic departments. In the 2007-8 season, the Southeastern Conference distributed an average of $5.3 million in football and basketball television revenue to each of its 12 members. In August, the SEC signed 15-year television contracts with ESPN and CBS that will generate even more money.

Last week, the Arkansas athletic department said it would spend $1 million to help the university avoid increasing tuition. In December, the athletic department at South Carolina agreed to steer $1 million of its television revenue back to the university.

“There’s no doubt that most if not all our institutions are experiencing budget issues with their state legislatures,”
said Mike Slive, the commissioner of the SEC. “To the extent that our athletic departments can assist, they’ve done that.”

Because many tickets to SEC football games for the coming season were sold before the downturn, universities may not feel the effect of the recession for another six or eight months, Slive said.

The Ohio Valley Conference, which includes 11 universities in Alabama, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee, is not so fortunate. It reduced the number of teams that play in conference championship tournaments to six, eliminated media days before the football and basketball seasons (instead conducting news conferences online), and stopped printing media guides.

“We were doing cost containment before cost containment was cool,” said Jon A. Steinbrecher, the conference commissioner until last week, when he took over as the head of the Mid-American Conference. “It’s not huge dollars, but by the time you eliminate two media days and print media guides, you’re talking $25,000 to $40,000 in savings.”

Teams in the conference are taking buses on longer trips to avoid flying, and staying overnight less often.

At Lehigh, which has 25 varsity sports and competes in the Patriot League, athletes on the volleyball, field hockey and soccer teams will return to campus only a few days before dormitories open, instead of a full week. The change will save the athletic department about $20,000 in room and board.

Joe Sterrett, Lehigh’s athletic director, trimmed $250,000 from his budget. He said he was also concerned about a potential decline in the number of athletes who attend the university’s sports camps, which bring in as much as $900,000 each summer.

“You have to look for ways to squeeze,” he said.
May 3, 2009

Community Colleges Challenge Hierarchy With 4-Year Degrees

By TAMAR LEWIN

MIAMI — When LaKisha Coleman received her associate’s degree at Miami Dade Community College six years ago, her best bet for a bachelor’s degree seemed to be at the more expensive Florida International University.

But nowadays, Miami Dade College — the “Community” has been dropped — offers bachelor’s degrees in teaching and nursing and public safety management, and will soon add engineering technology, film production and others. Ms. Coleman returned to Miami Dade two years ago and is about to graduate with a degree in public safety management.

Ms. Coleman now recommends the college to family members. “It’s much cheaper, the teachers are good, you can do it in the evening while you work, and everyone’s very helpful,” she said.

As Ms. Coleman discovered, the line between community colleges and four-year universities is blurring.

Florida leads the way, with 14 community colleges authorized to offer bachelor’s degrees, and 12 already doing so, in fields as varied as fire safety management and veterinary technology. But nationwide, 17 states, including Nevada, Texas and Washington, have allowed community colleges to award associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, and in some, the community colleges have become four-year institutions. Others states are considering community college baccalaureates.

In most cases, the expanding community colleges argue that they are fulfilling a need, providing four-year degrees to working people who often lack the money or the time to travel to a university. But some of those universities are fighting back, saying the community colleges are involved in “mission creep” that may distract them from their traditional mission and lead to watered-down bachelor’s degrees.

“It’s cooking in several states, in many work-force-related fields, but there’s a lot of debate and politics, and differing views on whether they’re still community colleges if they give baccalaureates,” said Beth Hagan, executive director of the Community College Baccalaureate Association, a nonprofit group that promotes the trend.

In Michigan, community colleges are seeking to offer baccalaureates in culinary arts, cement technology and nursing. Their efforts have stalled, said Mike Hansen, president of the Michigan Community College Association.

“We need legislation to do it, and the legislation’s been introduced, but that’s as far as it’s gotten,” Mr. Hansen said. “The four-year universities in the state are very much opposed to the idea.”

Mike Boulus, the executive director of the group that represents the four-year universities, called the plan to
expand community colleges “a solution in search of a problem.”

“It’s clearly unnecessary,” Mr. Boulus said. “Community colleges should stick with the important work they do extremely well, offering two-year degrees and preparing students for transfer to four-year schools.”

Some critics worry that community college baccalaureates will drive up costs, take resources from needy students and lead to low-quality degrees.

At Miami Dade College, more than 1,000 students are enrolled in baccalaureate programs. Their average age is 33; three-quarters are women, and slightly more than half are Hispanic.

Miami Dade’s president, Eduardo J. Padrón, said the baccalaureate programs were part of his institution’s mission of serving the community.

“We supply the area’s nurses and the teachers, and we respond quickly to new work force needs in our community, training people for real jobs,” Dr. Padrón said. “You won’t see us starting a B.A. in sociology. We’re offering degrees in things the universities don’t want to do.”

He emphasized that the programs required the same kinds of general education courses as four-year universities.

Miami Dade’s baccalaureate courses feel unlike a typical college class. In a recent Monday evening class, Ms. Coleman and others were quick to share experiences from outside the class. The evening’s topic was correctional officers — their pay, job requirements, working conditions and subculture. One student knew a guard who was fired for trafficking in cellphones; another tells of how the guards treated visitors when her son was in jail.

Almost all had earned their associate’s degree, a prerequisite for the baccalaureate programs, at Miami Dade and had taken some classes at Florida International, but had found them expensive and unsatisfying.

Ms. Coleman, the third of 10 children, took 10 years after high school graduation to earn her associates’ degree because she was working and had to take semesters off to care for her younger siblings and ailing mother.

Dr. Padrón said community colleges existed to serve students like Ms. Coleman.

“We have an open-door policy, and we serve 62 percent of Miami-Dade district graduates who go to college,” said Dr. Padrón, referring to the local public school system. “Eighty percent of our students work, and 58 percent of them come from low-income families.

“Ours is a mission of rescue. The universities that handpick their students based on SATs and grades get three times the funding we do. We are the underfunded overachiever.”

Dr. Padrón said he had no plans for Miami Dade to become Miami Dade State College, as it is entitled to be.

Some community colleges that offered baccalaureates have, however, morphed into four-year institutions, repeating a pattern in American higher education.

“From the 1840s to the 1940s we had the sequence where normal schools, founded to train teachers, became teachers’ colleges, then abandoned that role to become colleges, and then the ball would keep rolling and they would become universities,” said Christopher J. Lucas, an education professor at the University of Arkansas.
“This has some of that feel. I get a little uneasy when I see community colleges playing at being four-year universities. When you try to be all things to all people, you end up not being very good for any of them.”

Community-college baccalaureates challenge the educational hierarchy's boundaries between the research mission of universities, the teaching mission of colleges and open admissions for community colleges.

“Many people in leadership believe that's the right division of labor,” said Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. “So like any fundamental change, the blurring of the lines is uncomfortable.”

Further complicating matters, some four-year universities offer not only nursing and teaching degrees but also applied baccalaureates — Bachelor of Applied Science or Bachelor of Applied Technology — in the fields into which community colleges are expanding. “The old categories that divided the world up between big-picture and applied-skills are out of date and dysfunctional,” Dr. Schneider said. “So colleges and universities of all kinds — two-year, four-year, public and private — are feeling their way toward a synthesis.”
Five Money Lessons for New College Grads

By Karen Blumenthal

This spring's college grads are heading out into a world where jobs are tough to come by. The economic outlook is uncertain and all the older people they know are feeling the pain of stock-market losses.

Worse, there are all kinds of nitty-gritty details to deal with: opening bank accounts, choosing health insurance, finding an apartment, lining up transportation and figuring out how to invest. How is a young person supposed to get ahead in this environment?

It's not easy to master money management during the best times and it's especially hard to navigate the challenges of a recession. Still, many of the same basic principles apply in good times and bad. And getting a taste of a downturn at the start may make current graduates smarter and more thoughtful than those who graduate during boom times.

Here are five broad financial lessons that can pay dividends for a lifetime:

1 Savings matter.

Whether you call it rainy-day money, an emergency fund or just reserves, having cash in the bank is important at any time, but it's especially comforting and crucial these days.

In the bigger picture, having savings also means much more than just having money in an account. People who save, for the most part, have learned to live within their means. Most likely, they have a handle on how to budget and how to shop carefully.

The payoff is huge. People with savings have great options. If you aim to have at least six months of living expenses socked away, you can probably weather a job loss or a medical emergency. If you save more, you can take advantage of the downturn in home prices or take vacations and buy cars without getting in a hole.

2 Find the fine print.

Nearly every transaction these days seems to require a written agreement, from leases to health-club memberships to cellphone services. If you're used to checking "I agree" every time you add software to your computer, you may take other contracts just as lightly. But you'll learn quickly about the costs buried in the fine print once you miss a payment or find yourself on the hook for a $175 termination fee for breaking a cellphone contract.

To avoid that headache, look at agreements and contracts as though you were on a scavenger hunt for key facts: How can you end this agreement? How can the other side terminate the deal? What exactly will you be paying and when? And what happens if a payment is late or missed? Knowing the significant details will help you make better decisions and avoid much grief later on.

3 Focus on the total cost.

Over and over, salesmen will try to lure us into buying a nicer car or house or taking on a longer loan by touting the monthly payment. But if you want to keep more of your hard-earned money for yourself, calculate the full cost including interest and
fees before weighing the monthly bill.

For example, some lenders may encourage grads to consolidate and stretch out their student loans, paying them off over 20 years instead of 10 to lower the monthly payment.

Repaying $10,000 in 6.8% loans over 20 years will cut the monthly payment to $76.33 from $115.08. But it will also more than double the interest paid -- and your payments will total about $18,300, instead of $13,800. Understanding the total amount makes painfully apparent just how much money will go to someone else.

4 Debt is the great divide.

Taking on some debt can sometimes really pay off, such as when we borrow to buy a home or invest in education. At times, we need to pay off a major purchase or medical bill over a few months. But while debt can be useful, more often than not, debt is a continuing drag on our finances that limits our choices and separates the haves and have-nots.

That's why you need to treat your credit card like a powerful financial tool that has to be managed properly and safely, in the same way that you had to learn the rules of driving a car. If you don't already have a credit card, apply for one before you graduate, since getting a first card can be easier as a student. Limit yourself to one card or no more than two -- one to use regularly and one for true emergencies.

Ask the bank to set a low initial credit limit of, say, $1,000 so that you can't run up big bills. Use email or text message alerts to remind you when the bill is due and alert you if you are near your credit limit. Pay your bill on time and in full every month, or at least pay as much as you can possibly pay. Then, remember this last lesson:

5 There is a permanent record.

It's not your academic transcript that will stick with you, but how you manage your money. Credit scores, calculated by credit bureaus based on how much debt you have and how well you manage it, will follow you through your adult life. Over time, that score will affect how much you can borrow, the interest rate you'll pay, whether you can rent the apartment you want and sometimes whether you get a certain job.

Young people won't start out with the highest credit scores because they don't have much of a credit history. But your score will improve if you pay your bills on time, keep your borrowing to 20% or less of your total credit limit and apply for new credit only if you really need it.

A high credit score, just like a growing savings account, means you will have more options. Ultimately, that's what a healthy financial life is all about: having choices to get to wherever you want to go.


Write to Karen Blumenthal at karen.blumenthal@dowjones.com
Insurance for Graduates

JULIAN MNIER

The tough economy has many new grads leaving college without a job lined up -- forcing them to wrestle with questions about health insurance.

Students who've been covered by a parent's policy or one through the school may find themselves without insurance as early as graduation day. Fortunately, most people in this age group have a number of options, even if they haven't yet found a job.

Students who've been covered by plans offered by their colleges should contact the school. Some alumni associations offer insurance options for grads.

Those who have been insured through Mom or Dad's plan may have more options, depending on the employer and also on state laws.

Families generally need to notify the plans when dependents are no longer full-time students. Many new grads will have coverage until the end of the calendar year, and those in some states will be eligible for a few more years of coverage even if they're not full-time students.

**Pay to Continue Coverage**

Many others can take advantage of the federal law called Cobra to buy continuing coverage under a parent's plan. Parents need to contact their human-resources department or insurance company to find out about options, says Kathy Bakich, national compliance health practice leader at The Segal Co., a benefits consulting firm.

Tom Billet, a senior consultant at consulting firm Watson Wyatt, says companies typically have 30 days to notify the worker that extended coverage is available under Cobra, and the employee has 30 days to sign up. Coverage is available for up to 36 months, at up to 102% of the company's per-person cost, and covers pre-existing conditions.

Mr. Billet says individual coverage purchased privately may be less expensive for this age group, but unlike coverage through Cobra, cost and availability may be based on an individual's health. Check if pre-existing conditions would be covered.

Sam Gibbs, senior vice president at eHealthInsurance, an online clearinghouse for insurance, says about 85% of people who apply are approved, and some states have "guaranteed issue."

But insurers have also rejected potential customers for conditions as common as asthma, allergies and Caesarean sections.

**Low Premiums**

"The good news is for most 21-, 22-year-olds there are plans that are very affordable," says Mr. Gibbs. A 2008 study found the average monthly premium for 18- to 24-year-olds was just $107 a month -- albeit with a substantial average deductible of $1,932.

"The smart thing to do if you're in good health is to buy a policy with a high deductible and low premiums, to protect you in an event of a catastrophic illness," says Mr. Billet. Skipping coverage may be tempting, but it's foolish because there's always the risk
of serious illness or accident.

States also have programs for low-income individuals and the chronically ill. Check with your state insurance commission or CoverageforAll.org for possible plans.

If you’ve already lined up a job, but plan to first spend the summer at the beach, another option is short-term or temporary insurance. These policies are typically for only six to 12 months and are usually fast and easy to get.

Write to Jillian Mincer at jillian.mincer@dowjones.com
U.S. students try life on Qatar campuses
By Vivian Salama, Special for USA TODAY

DOHA, Qatar — Doha may not have New York City's bustle or Chicago's charm. But as the global economy gets worse, it's becoming an affordable — if slightly unusual — college town for more American students.

Half a dozen U.S. universities have opened branch campuses here that are thriving because of generous financial support from the government of Qatar.

Qatar — a tiny, oil-rich Persian Gulf nation — is offering substantial financial aid to most foreign students who need it — often chopping tuition to a quarter of what it costs at home, according to the government.

Qatar has struggled to diversify its economy away from oil and gas revenue. It sees the university sponsorships as a way to build its academic credentials — locals also attend classes — and bolster its workforce. The government offers foreign students the option of repaying each year of study with a year of work in Qatar.

"Qatar knows there aren’t enough Qatars to build the economy that they want to build, so they are delighted when people come from all over the world," says Chuck Thorpe, dean of Carnegie Mellon's branch here in Doha. "They are willing to offer all sorts of financial aid to get people to come here and study."

Six American universities have branch campuses in Doha's academic hub, a 2,500-acre campus known as Education City: Virginia Commonwealth, Weill Cornell Medical College, Georgetown, Texas A&M, Carnegie Mellon and coming this fall, Northwestern.

The number of U.S. citizens attending classes at Education City is relatively low — Weill Cornell tops the list with 26 Americans among its 239 students this academic year — but the number of university applications has gone up this year and is likely to keep rising, Thorpe says.

"This is a viable option for Americans looking for a U.S.-quality education that isn't impacted by the current economic crisis. And we expect more students to take notice of that," Thorpe adds.

Most of the current American students opted to study in Doha before the recession began and consider themselves fortunate.

"It has certainly been a surreal experience to be overseas during (the recession), and I'm sure I will be returning to a very different climate than the one I left," says Kristina Ricco, 24, of Miami, who is studying architecture at Carnegie Mellon in Doha.

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